are covered by a bilateral agreement. A revised bilateral visa agreement was signed in 2001. As a result of these exchanges and other initiatives to promote bilateral ties, there has been a greater degree of trust and mutual understanding on political matters and significant increase in trade, in people to people contacts and in cultural exchanges between the two countries.

3. The Government is committed to promoting increased trade and commerce between the North Eastern Region and Bangladesh and other parts of the country and has raised the issue of grant of transit for Indian goods through Bangladesh with the Government of Bangladesh at various levels. Bangladesh has not agreed to grant of these transit facilities over land, though transit through inland waterways takes place in accordance with a bilateral protocol signed in this regard.

Asian Highway Network

*150. SHRIMATI JAMANA DEVI BARUPAL:
DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:

Will the Minister of ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the country has signed a historical international agreement for completing 140,000 km. Asian Highway Network which would significantly promote regional integration and co-operation;

(b) if so, whether apart from India, countries such as Pakistan, China, South Korea and Vietnam have signed the inter-Governmental agreement at the ministerial segment of the 60th session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific;

(c) if so, whether this agreement is a landmark and would further facilitate border crossing for people, vehicles, goods and other benefits to landlocked countries; and

(d) by when this work is likely to be completed?

THE MINISTER OF ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T.R. BAALU):(a) and (b) India, along with 5 other countries including Pakistan, China, Republic of Korea and Vietnam, has signed the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Asian Highways during the 60th Annual Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP) held in April, 2004. The agreement is for development of the Asian Highway Network in each country to a minimum acceptable standard within the framework of National Programme.

(c) This agreement does not provide acceptance of an obligation by any party to permit the movement of goods and passenger traffic across its territory.

(d) No specific time-frame for completion of works has been stipulated in the agreement.

Economic package for Assam

*151. SHRI DWIJENDRA NATH SHARMAH: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Assam is still the poorest and the most backward State in the country;

(b) if so, the percentage of people living below the poverty line, as well as the literacy and drop-out rates;

(c) the action taken up to assist the State to come up to the national level norms and the details of economic package for the poor people proposed to be formulated; and

(d) if no action has been taken so far, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING (SHRI M.V. RAJASEKHARAN): (a) The ranking of States by the per capita State Domestic Product (SDP) indicates that Assam is one of the poorest States in the country. Among the major States, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh had lower per capita SDP in 2001-02, the last year for which data is available. The National Human Development Report, 2001 indicates that amongst major States, Bihar has a lower Human Development Index (HDI) than Assam in 2001.

(b) 36.09 per cent of people in the State are living below the poverty line (1999-2000 estimates). As per census data 2001, percentage of literate persons in the State is 64.28. Percentage of drop-out rates from Class-I to IV, Class-I to VIII and Class-I to X is 48.64, 69.29 and 75.61 respectively.

(c) and (d) Action taken to assist the State to come to the National level norms is as follows:

(i) Government of India has categorized Assam as a Special Category State, entitling the State to receive funds for their